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James Earl Ray's Defense Attorney, Fred Schwarz, says that James Earl Ray is innocent of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

BY ROBERT E. JOHNSON

Convicted assassin James Earl Ray's chief defense lawyer charges that agents of the U.S. government are the real killers of civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

Ray's younger brother, Jerry, agrees.

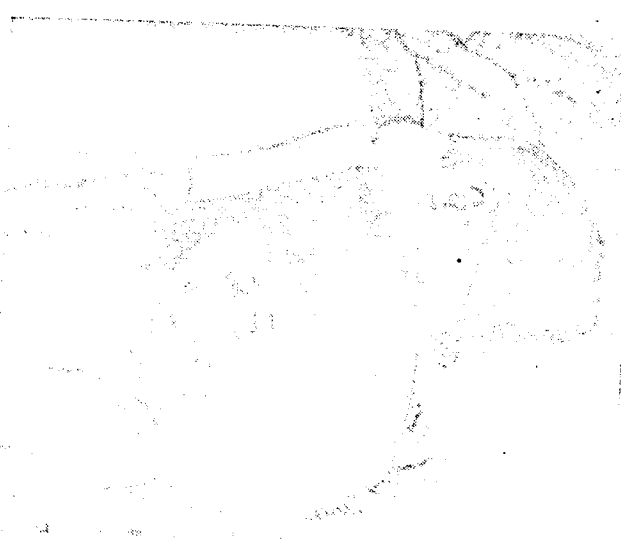
Both the brother and the lawyer blame "pressure" or "coercion" from federal agents for forcing Ray to repudiate a statement he reportedly dictated to his brother August 13 in the Tennessee State Prison, in which he told of a government conspiracy to murder King.

In the statement, Jerry Ray quoted his brother as saying he had been working with U.S. undercover agents, supplying arms to Cuban revolutionaries trying to overthrow Fidel Castro, when he was lured to Memphis at the time of King's death in April 1968.

"I knew nothing about King being in Memphis until after King had been killed," the statement quoted James Earl Ray as saying. "I know that the federal agents merely used me to be the fall guy when they killed King."

Jerry Ray, 34, turned the statement over to a St. Louis television station, claiming it was dictated word-for-word during a prison interview with his brother. "I had to talk to Jim through a sheet of glass by phone and he couldn't sign anything," Jerry told an ENQUIRER reporter. "All I could do was write down what he told me. I couldn't get his signature on it."

Ray, on September 3, when James Earl Ray



STUNNED: James Earl Ray is led into prison after being sentenced to serve 99 years.

was shown a copy of the earlier statement by Robert W. Hill, one of his attorneys. Ray took it and wrote along the margin of the paper:

"I am not responsible for this statement."

He then signed his disavowal of the statement his brother had attributed to him.

Now the convicted assassin's chief defense attorney, J.E. Stoner, says the statement was repudiated only "because of pressure from the U.S. government."

"Whether the pressure was applied to Mr. Ray or to Mr. Hill, I don't know," Stoner said. "But I ^{to} make inquiries and find out."

Stoner had told newsmen on August 8, following a visit with Ray in his prison cell, that his client was "completely innocent" of King's murder.

"Today's visit with Mr. Ray was the most interesting visit so far," the attorney said. "We discussed the federal government's involvement in the killing of King . . . that certain agencies of the federal government had King killed and all Mr. Ray was was a fall guy, and he is completely innocent."

"The government doesn't want him to have a trial because they don't want the facts to come out."

Asked by an incredulous reporter if he meant that Ray, who pleaded guilty to shooting King with a high-powered rifle and received a 99-year sentence, really did not kill the civil rights leader, Stoner replied:

"I'm saying positively that, in any trial, the facts and the evidence would show that James Earl Ray is completely innocent, and that agents of the federal government are the ones who actually killed King."

Stoner now believes Ray may have been subjected to physical coercion to change his startling story. Either that, or the other lawyer, Hill, was subjected to pressure by federal officials.

"Mr. Ray could have been pressured very easily in solitary

confinement," said Stoner. "But I think it's more likely the government got to Mr. Hill."

Jerry Ray agreed that the repudiation of the first statement was more likely Hill's doing than his brother's.

"Jim's got too much courage for that," Jerry said in an exclusive ENQUIRER interview. "Besides, he's already got 99 years and has very little to lose by speaking out."

As for Hill, Jerry had this to say:

"He's young, ambitious and doesn't want to make enemies. I think he may have gone in to visit Jim and come out with that statement to protect his own reputation."

It was at the request of The ENQUIRER that attorney Hill took the original statement by James Earl Ray into prison to ask Ray to either confirm or deny that he had made the statement.

Hill, 29, of Chattanooga, came out with a denial, plus an additional statement, allegedly written by Ray, in which the convicted assassin labeled the original statement "imaginary."

"A few self-appointed spokesmen for the defense have been making statements of a somewhat 'Mickey Mouse' nature . . . and relating them to me," it said. "They make these statements for personal reasons."

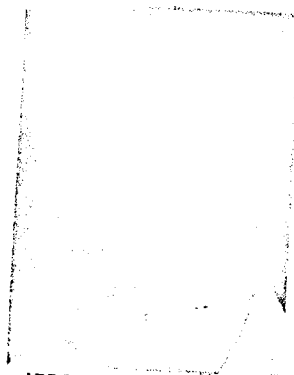
James Earl also expressed his anger at his brother for distributing the earlier statement by asking that Jerry's name be removed from the prison list of approved visitors.

Warden William S. Neil of the Tennessee State Prison announced September 4 that he had complied with the request and removed Jerry Ray's name from the visitor list.

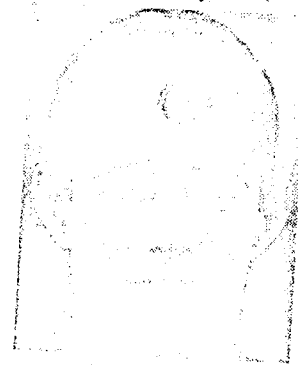
Hill told The ENQUIRER that Jerry Ray's actions had deeply hurt his imprisoned brother. He said James Earl "has never said" that federal agents killed King.

"Jerry apparently has overblown desires to use this as some sort of public forum," Hill charged. "Jerry must enjoy publicity. The entire statement was purely imaginary."

Meanwhile, both Jerry Ray and Attorney Stoner



JERRY RAY: Says his brother is innocent.



ATTORNEY Robert W. Hill

vowed to continue to push for an investigation to determine the true facts of the case. A major feud appeared to be developing between Stoner and Hill over legal aspects of the case.

"If Mr. Hill influenced Mr. Ray to retract the statement, he has sabotaged Mr. Ray's case," Stoner said, "and I will insist that one of us withdraw as James Earl Ray's counsel if this turns out to be true."

Stoner also claimed to have in his possession a signed statement by James Earl supporting what he supposedly told Jerry Ray.

"The statement is locked away in some files I've hidden so the FBI can't get at them," Stoner said.

Jerry maintains that, under Tennessee law, his brother is entitled to a new trial, because the sentencing judge died before ruling on a motion for a new trial.

A second judge, however, ruled that James Earl gave up any right to a new trial when he pleaded guilty to the King murder charge.

And Jerry concluded with an ominous warning:

"Jim's last words to me were that — when and if he gets a new trial — he won't only shake the United States with his testimony, but he will shake the whole world."